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Some Problems of Russo-Byzantine Relations c. 860–c. 1050

J. SHEPARD

To what extent was mutual suspicion a feature of relations between the Russians and the Byzantines? The Byzantines feared both attacks on their capital and permanent settlement by the Russians on the Black Sea coast. For their part, the Russians were suspicious of the Byzantines and the wonders they claimed to perform. But the wonder was tinged with fascination and the Russians were attracted by the Byzantines' wealth and by the God to whom they attributed their good fortune. In their dealings with the Russians, the Byzantines took them and their leaders seriously and often treated them with respect. This in turn enhanced and even extended the prestige and authority of Russia's rulers. But, in the 10th century, Byzantium also had a profoundly divisive effect on Russian society, and tended to undermine that same authority of the prince. This contradiction was partly resolved by Vladimir's adoption of Christianity between 988 and 989. By this action, he gained for his people a place in the Byzantine, and more generally, the Christian world picture, and he harnessed Byzantine forms of prestige in support of his own. By stopping short of claiming equality with the Empire, Kiev's princes in the 11th century gained access to the art and ideas of a superior civilisation and were, in a sense, enabled to 'catch up' and even 'overtake' the peoples of Western Europe in the 11th and 12th centuries.

Before developing these themes, it is worth noting a point about the chief sources. Oddly enough direct evidence for Russo-Byzantine relations is fuller for the 10th than the 11th century, although it was in the latter century that a Christian Church was, with Byzantium's help, organised in Russia. There are numerous literary references to Russo-Byzantine relations in the 11th century, but they have to be pieced together like the fragments of a shattered vase, and the model for this task of restoration is, in large part, that which is suggested by 10th-century sources. This phenomenon is largely the work of chance, though, as far as *De administrando imperio*¹ is concerned, one wonders whether it was not too good to be replaced, and continued to be used after part of it had fallen out of date; Psellus seems to have

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¹ The work known as *De administrando imperio* (hereafter called *DAI*) is a manual compiled by the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus for his son and heir Romanus in the mid-10th century. It surveys the diplomatic scene and it is a mixture of historical information and guidelines for diplomatic practice. The edition referred to in this article is edited by G. Moravcsik and R. H. J. Jenkins, Dumbarton Oaks, 1967 (hereafter called Moravcsik-Jenkins).

consulted it in the 11th century.² As far as Russian documents are concerned, our main source for both the 10th and the 11th centuries is the Primary Chronicle. It is far more informative about Russo-Byzantine relations in the 10th century than the 11th, but, because of the interval between the 10th and the beginning of the 12th century, when the Primary Chronicle assumed its present form, its evidence must be handled with caution.

With this proviso, one may consider the Byzantines' fear of the Russians. This is, at first sight, surprising, for Constantinople was a long way from where the Russians lived, and there were enemies much nearer home—the Bulgarians, the Magyars and the Pechenegs. But the first appearance of a Russian war-fleet off the Golden Horn in 860 undoubtedly came as a surprise. The Patriarch Photius, in the two homilies which he delivered at the time of the attack, expressed the shock which the Byzantines felt at the sudden appearance of the Russians, who 'were separated from us by so many lands and peoples, navigable rivers and harbourless seas'.³ One must emphasise the difficulties faced by Russians who travelled to Byzantium. The Russians who had arrived at Theophilus's court in about 838 were unable to return directly to their own people, who probably lived in northern Russia, because of the risk of attack on the way.⁴ Over a hundred years later, Constantine Porphyrogenitus wrote of the 'travail and terror, difficulty and danger' which beset the Russian fleets which sailed to Byzantium.⁵ For such journeys, great qualities of seamanship were needed, and these the Russians possessed; their ownership of boats marked them out from the other people living to the north of Byzantium. Their boats were small in comparison with the Byzantine *dromon* and *chelandion*⁶ and had the worst of most of the battles they ever fought with them, but they could each carry a fair number of men—perhaps 50 or 60—and could move fast. The

² In Psellus's account of the Russo-Byzantine war of 1043, he states that the Russian ships were made of wood which had been brought down from northern Russia—*anóthen*—and terms them *monoxyla*. This term is also used by *DAL* in its description of the Russians' preparation of their boats for the journey to Constantinople. It is, however, possible that Psellus was describing the methods of his own time, which had not altered over the past century. See Psellus, *Chronographia*, ed. E. Renauld, II, Paris, 1928, p. 9; Moravcsik-Jenkins, pp. 56–9.

³ Photius, *Homilies*, trans. C. Mango, Cambridge, Mass., 1958, p. 88; for Greek text, see V. Laourdas (ed.), *Phōtiou Homiliai*, Thessalonica, 1959, p. 34. For a detailed survey of the first attack, see A. A. Vasiliev, *The Russian Attack on Constantinople in 860*, Cambridge, Mass., 1946, pp. 90–113, 188–218.

⁴ G. Waitz (ed.) *Annales Bertiniani*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica in usum scholarum* (hereafter called *MGH*), Hanover, 1883, pp. 19–20.

⁵ Moravcsik-Jenkins, pp. 62–3.

⁶ See H. Glykatzki-Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer*, Paris, 1966, p. 413; A. Poppe, 'La dernière expédition russe contre Constantinople' (*Byzantino-slavica*, XXXII, Prague, 1971, no. 2 pp. 248–9). On the problem of what the Byzantines meant by *monoxylon* see D. Obolensky in *DAL*, II, *Commentary*, London, 1962, pp. 23–5 (hereafter called *Commentary*).

Russians had a much better chance than other northern people of surprising the capital of the Empire, which usually had only a small garrison of effective guards—hence the fear they aroused in Byzantium.

Again and again in his homilies Photius emphasised the suddenness of the attack in 860 which was ‘like a thunderbolt from heaven’, and ‘unlike any other raids from barbarians’. One of the distinctive features of the Russians (i.e. the Scandinavian Rus’) which Photius and 10th-century sources mention was their savagery and lack of mercy to their prisoners. Such ferocity was in part the result of their martial ardour, and was noted by the victims of Scandinavian raids in Western Europe too. But it was also caused by the fact that the Russians faced a long return journey, up river and over rapids in small boats. Captives would have been a liability rather than an asset, and this helps to explain why the Russians were feared by the Byzantines more than attackers from the land: for, as Photius’s homilies and the Byzantine chronicles of the 10th century show, the Russians were not interested in live captives. But their boats enabled them to cut off supplies from the capital, and, even in the relatively short siege of June 860, this must have been a grim prospect for a city as populous as Constantinople. No wonder that the imperial authorities took such trouble to ensure a store of grain in the capital!

One of the Byzantines’ fears was, then, that the Russians would seize the capital. Of course, we know that they never did, but the Byzantines had no hindsight, and the Russians in 860, and perhaps in 1043, seem nearly to have entered the capital. Photius tells of their ‘crawling out of the very gateway of the city’ and believed that they had the specific intention of capturing Constantinople. Photius’s belief was shared by Byzantines throughout the 10th century; it was then said that the prophecy in Ezekiel that there would come forth from the north a ruler Gog, Prince of Ros, who would with his hordes devastate Israel, referred to the Russians.⁷ The Byzantines seem to have identified themselves with the Israelites and to have feared a new *Diaspora*. Writers of the time, Leo the Deacon, Gregory,

⁷ Leo the Deacon, *Historia*, ed. C. B. Hase, Bonn, 1828, p. 150; Gregory’s ‘Life of St Basil the New,’ in A. N. Veselovsky, ‘Razyskaniya v oblasti russkogo dukhovnogo stikha’ (*Sbornik Otdela russkogo yazyka i slovesnosti Imperatorskoy Akademii nauk*, XLVI, St Petersburg, 1889, 6, prilozheniye, pp. 65, 67); Symeon Magister (‘Pseudo-Symeon’), *Annales*, in *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I. Bekker, Bonn, 1838, p. 707. The prophecy of Ezekiel concerning Ros and Magog had been associated, both by Bible commentators and in the popular imagination, with the peoples of the steppes, the ‘Scyths’, long before their Scandinavian namesakes appeared on the scene: A. Florovsky, ‘Knyaz “Rosh” u proroka Iezehiilya (gl. 38–39)’ in *Sbornik v chest na V.I. Zhdatarsky*, Sofia, 1925, pp. 512–3, 516–7; Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, pp. 166–75. It should be noted that in the text above the term ‘Russians’ designates a people of Scandinavian extraction, who were still distinguishable from the Slavic population, among whom they settled in the mid-10th century. By about 1000, it may be applied to all inhabitants of ‘Kievan Russia’.

the author of the Life of St Basil the Young, and perhaps 'Pseudo-Symeon', mention this prophecy. This apocalyptic attitude to the Russians is shared by an anonymous author who wrote a description of an equestrian statue in the Forum of Taurus. On its base were bas-reliefs, depicting 'the last days of the City, when the Russians are going to capture it'. These words were, apparently, written about 995, shortly after the official conversion of the Russians to Christianity.⁸ Fifty years later, they were nearly fulfilled, when in 1043 a Russian war fleet again appeared off the Golden Horn. Michael Psellus was an eye-witness, as Photius had been in 860, and, like Photius, he emphasised the suddenness of the Russians' appearance and their overwhelming numbers. Russo-Byzantine relations had grown far more complicated by 1043, but there was still an element of fear.

This fear was, in part, for the safety of the capital, but the Byzantines were also uneasy about the Russians' presence on the shores of the Black Sea. This is indicated by one of the clauses in the treaty of 944, which stipulated that the Russians should not winter by the mouth of the Dnieper but should return to their homes in Russia. The Byzantines must have wondered whether the Russians were intending to establish permanent settlements on the Black Sea coast: this would have been tempting for any inhabitants of northern Russia who were engaged in long distance trade. The journey northwards across the Black Sea and up rivers such as the Dnieper was far more difficult than the southwards journey, for, quite apart from the river's southwards flow, the prevailing current in the Black Sea is anti-clockwise, towards the Bosphorus, and in late summer the prevailing winds are northerly.⁹ Many a Russian beating northwards at the end of the trading season in August or September, must have felt the need for a port on the Black Sea's northern shore, which would have made trade between north and south much easier. For one of the problems which beset Russian traders was that their boats had to be small and light, so that they could easily be dragged over the Dnieper rapids,¹⁰ and yet they also had to be able to withstand the Black Sea's sudden squalls. It would have been more convenient to have broken that journey at, for example, the mouth of the Dnieper and transferred goods to larger ships, better suited to the Black

⁸ C. Mango, 'A Note on the Ros-Dromitai', in *Prospora eis S.P. Kyriakidén (Hellenika)*, IV, Thessalonica, 1953, p. 460. Professor Mango also notes that the bas-relief, a bronze figurine, is 'a clear instance of sympathetic magic', whereby the Byzantines hoped to ward off the Russian menace.

⁹ See *Der grosse Brockhaus*, X, Wiesbaden, 1956, pp. 535-6; cf. V. P. Zenkovich, *Bereg Chernogo i Azovskogo morey*, Moscow, 1958, pp. 47, 53.

¹⁰ This point was not lost on Byzantine strategists: see the *Naumachika* of Leo VI in A. Dain (ed.), *Naumachika*, Paris, 1943, p. 32.

Sea.¹¹ There is, unfortunately, no direct evidence of the Russians reasoning thus, but there is plenty of evidence that they were, up to the end of the 10th century at least, a restless people not firmly settled in any particular area. According to *De administrando* the Russians spent the winter travelling around collecting tribute from the Slavs and went south in the summer to trade with Byzantium.¹² Most contemporary rulers and ruling groups in Europe spent much of their time travelling round their lands and such activity does not by itself indicate any basic restlessness, but there is corroborative evidence of the rootlessness of the Russians. An Arab writer of the early 11th century wrote a full account of a Russian expedition to the Caspian Sea in 943–944.¹³ One of the outstanding features of this account is that the Russians seem to have intended to settle around Bardaa; they tried to reach an agreement with the inhabitants of that city, and to impose a kind of tribute on them. In the event, this migration came to nothing, for a tragi-comic reason which may nonetheless be significant. The Russians are said to have eaten vast amounts of fruit from which they fell ill, and, for the most part, died. This sad story may in fact supply one reason why the Russians failed to establish a significant presence in more southerly climates. Historians have recently begun to pay more attention to geographical and climatic factors in, for example, the problem of the Slavic settlement in the Balkans in the 7th century.¹⁴ One must admit that this factor was not always decisive, and Svyatoslav seems to have forgotten what happened to the Russians at Bard'aa when he decided to settle on the Danube in about 970. It is perhaps worth noting that fruit is one of the products he is said to have listed among the trading-goods there.¹⁵ The Russians seem to have been keenly aware of the attractions of the Danube region and of the trade which flowed through it. It seems that in the late 11th century, Vasilko Rostislavich, a Russian prince, intended to seize power over 'the Danube Bulgars'.¹⁶ And in 1116, an army under the command of Vyacheslav, a son of Vladimir Monomakh,¹⁷ made an unsuccessful attempt to seize Dorostolon.

¹¹ In the 10th century they are known to have re-equipped their boats on the island of St Aithérios, near the mouth of the Dnieper: Moravcsik–Jenkins, pp. 60–3. St Aithérios is generally identified with the isle of Berezhn on the north side of the mouth of the Dnieper.

¹² Moravcsik–Jenkins, pp. 62–3.

¹³ Ibn Miskawaih, 'The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate', translated in N. K. Chadwick, *The Beginnings of Russian History*, Cambridge, 1946, pp. 141–3.

¹⁴ See D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, London, 1971, p. 74.

¹⁵ *Povest' vremennykh let*, ed. D. S. Likhachev and V. P. Adrianova-Perets, I, Moscow, 1950, p. 48, s.a. 969 (hereafter called Likhachev); S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, Cambridge, Mass., 1953, p. 86 (hereafter called Cross).

¹⁶ Likhachev, I, p. 176, s.a. 1097; Cross, p. 193.

¹⁷ Likhachev, I, p. 201, s.a. 1116; this information is given by the Hypatian manuscript of the *Povest'* but not in the Laurentian, on which Cross based his translation. A convincing

These are, admittedly, isolated incidents and it is questionable whether Russians in organised groups, or large numbers, did manage to settle as far south as the Danube in the 11th century, but the danger of their doing so must have been real enough for the Byzantines. One diplomatic measure open to them was the use of steppe nomads, who could be encouraged to attack the Russians if the latter attacked the Byzantine Empire. For example, in 968 Svyatoslav had to give up his Bulgarian campaign and return to Kiev for a while to beat off a Pecheneg attack.¹⁸ This aspect of Byzantium's steppe diplomacy has been expounded by others, so it is appropriate to consider another, Byzantine propaganda to the Russians. As already seen, the Byzantines feared the Russians. It is now worth considering how the Byzantines frightened the Russians, or at least, how they tried to.

It was, perhaps, inevitable that the Russians would be impressed by Constantinople, the city which, in a sense, *was* the Empire in the eyes of northern barbarians. Its wealth, its walls and its strange devices, such as the chain across the Golden Horn fascinated northerners, who made up stories about it, and a few shreds of these stories are preserved in the Primary Chronicle's account of Oleg's expedition against Byzantium.¹⁹ But the fascination could easily turn to fear when it was a matter of war, and when the Greeks used their superior technology. Greek fire, in particular, terrified the Russians, and when it was used against them in 941 the Primary Chronicle says, 'there was a terrible miracle (*strashno chudo*) to be seen', and the survivors of the expedition compared it to 'lightning in the heavens'.²⁰ The Byzantines were quick to exploit the impact made by their technology, and to play on the northerners' superstitions. They emphasised that they had a great God and His saints on their side, and that those who attacked them would come to a bad end. John Zimisce is said to have reminded Svyatoslav in 971 of the disaster which befell his father's expedition against 'the royal city':— 'And I will leave aside [Igor's] miserable fate, and how he went on a campaign against the Germans, and was captured by them. He was tied to the stems of two saplings, [and they let go] and he split into two'.²¹ This statement seems to be historically inaccurate, and, if it was actually made, one can understand why Svyatoslav scoffed at Zimisce's claims. Nonetheless there are a few indications that

case for the original continuance of the Laurentian MS up to 1116 is made by L. Müller, 'Die "dritte Redaktion" der sogenannten Nestorchronik', in *Festschrift für M. Woltner*, Heidelberg, 1967, pp. 172-4, 185.

¹⁸ Likhachev, I, p. 47, s.a. 968; Cross, p. 85.

¹⁹ Likhachev, I, pp. 24-5, s.a. 907; Cross, pp. 64-5.

²⁰ Likhachev, I, p. 33, s.a. 941; Cross, p. 72.

²¹ Leo the Deacon, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

Byzantine threats did sometimes find their mark. It may have been noted by contemporary Russians that Svyatoslav's end was every bit as unpleasant as his father's: he was killed by the Pechenegs who used his skull as a drinking-cup. In fact, this episode is probably an example of the limitation of the Byzantines' influence over the Pechenegs, but sequences of sudden deaths are liable to breed superstition. The Byzantines' persistent claims of invincibility, and of aid from 'Christ . . . the deathless God' were so extravagant that they may have alienated rather than impressed the Russians. But such propaganda, when coupled with an actual victory, seems to have intensified the impact of the victory on the vanquished. After Zimisce's victory at Dorostolon in 971 the story was put about that St Theodore had appeared on a white horse in the thick of the battle and had led charge after charge against the Russians. There is no direct evidence of Russian reaction to these claims, but there is in the Primary Chronicle's account of the 941 expedition a rather strange reference to a Fedor *stratilat'*, who is said to have been one of the Byzantine commanders. Admittedly, this may be an example of the literal mentality of the Russians, who may have misunderstood Byzantine propaganda, or a Byzantine literary source which mentions St Theodore's help in 941.²² But it may show Russian awareness of Byzantine claims to supernatural aid; so, in a way, does the Primary Chronicle's reference to St Demetrius turning against the Byzantines in 907.²³ It is possible that the special ferocity the Russians showed to priests in 941 may have been a reaction to the Byzantines' supernatural claims,²⁴ and there is some evidence that, at least by the 11th century, the Russians accepted Byzantium's claims. According to the accounts in the *Sofiyskaya pervaya* (Sophia I) and the *Voskresenskaya* Chronicles of the Russian expedition to Constantinople in 1043, the Byzantines dipped the shroud of Christ in the sea and a great storm blew up which wrecked the Russian ships.²⁵

More generally, the Russians seem to have been suspicious of the Byzantines, seeing their handiwork in events for which they may not in fact have been responsible. For example, when Rostislav, a Russian prince who had settled at Tmutorokan on the Black Sea

²² Likhachev, I, p. 33, s.a. 941; Cross, p. 72. The 'Life of St Basil the New', which, through a Slavonic translation, contributed to the *Povest'*'s account of Igor's raid, alludes to a Byzantine general as 'Theodoros ho hagiotos stratelats': see Veselovsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-7, 98.

²³ Likhachev, I, p. 24, s.a. 907; Cross, p. 64.

²⁴ George Monachus Continuatus, in *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I. Bekker, Bonn, 1838, pp. 915-6.

²⁵ *Sofiyskaya pervaya letopis'*, in *Polnoye sobraniye russkikh letopisey* (hereafter called *PSRL*), V, St Petersburg, 1851, p. 137; *Voskresenskaya letopis'* *PSRL*, VII, St Petersburg, 1863, p. 331.

coast, died shortly after a visit of a Byzantine official, the official was believed to have poisoned him.²⁶ It may be that in some ways the Byzantines' claims to exercise, with divine help, influence and control in all places led their barbarian neighbours to detect their fell hand everywhere. The unease which the Russians felt about the Byzantines may be reflected in the popular response to a wizard who foretold that the Dnieper would flow backwards, countries would change places, and the land of Greece would take the place of the land of Rus'.²⁷ Yet, if there was distrust between Russians and Byzantines, it was tinged with fascination.

The Byzantines stood to gain in three respects. The Russians were able to supply them with the produce of the northern forests—furs, wax, honey and perhaps also timber, for the Russians needed fewer ships for the journey home than they did when loaded with their own bulky wares. In addition, they supplied the Byzantines with slaves and it is possible that this was the Russians' special *forte*. The forests of Central Europe were also stocked with honey and other produce which could be marketed in Byzantium, but the rulers of those parts do not seem to have been able to undertake the capture and regular shipment of slaves to Constantinople on the same scale as the Russians did. The Russian goods and slaves did not always end their journey at Constantinople: traders came from Islamic countries to the south and east and, to a much lesser extent, from the Christian west, on account of the variety of goods obtainable there. The Russians, then, helped to give the markets of Constantinople an 'international' flavour. They also gave the Byzantine Church an opportunity to display its ecumenical and apostolic nature. For the Byzantines seem to have been eager to spread the word of God north of the Black Sea. In part this was to save pagans from error and Hell, but the Byzantines were aware that, by making new converts to Christianity, they showed themselves to be carrying on the work of the first Apostles, and for them it probably bore the implication that no other Patriarch could make a superior claim. In other words, the Pope at Rome was no more apostolic than the Byzantine Church. It may be significant that Photius announced the first conversion of the Russians to Christianity in an encyclical addressed to the three Patriarchs of the East in 867, at the height of his dispute with Rome.²⁸ This missionary activity contributed to the prestige of the Patriarchate at Constantinople; it harmonised with the Byzantine idea that their Empire was 'not that of Rome, but of Christ', a heavenly

²⁶ Likhachev, I, p. 111, s.a. 1066; Cross, p. 145.

²⁷ Likhachev, I, p. 116, s.a. 1071; Cross, p. 150.

²⁸ J. P. Migne, *Patrologia graeca*, CII, Paris, 1860, cols. 735–8; V. Grumel, *Regestes des actes du Patriarchat de Constantinople*, I, 2, Istanbul, 1936, pp. 88–90.

Empire (*nebesnoye tsarstvo*) that would embrace all peoples. This was the role which Constantine-Kyrl claimed for Byzantium on his mission to the Khazars in about 861. For missionaries such as Kyrl, the Empire of Christ, which was not that of Rome, was to encompass all nations on earth.²⁹ At the same time, the imperial government was concerned to recover lands for the *territorial* empire in Asia Minor, Palestine and the Mediterranean. For this task, too, the Russians were useful to the Byzantines: in the 10th century Russian mercenaries played an important part in operations against the Arabs on Crete in 911 and 949, and also in the warfare on the Empire's eastern frontier.³⁰

Such, then, were the advantages to the Byzantine Empire of close ties with the Russians. It is less easy precisely to categorise the 'advantages' which the Russians derived from these contacts. It is, perhaps, more appropriate to consider the effects which their contact with the Byzantines had upon the Russians. These effects were, in part, deliberately intended by the Byzantines: for example, some of the northerners were converted to Christianity. But it is doubtful whether the Byzantines were aware of all the repercussions which contact with themselves had on the northerners. Perhaps the deepest impact they made came from the way they treated Russia's princes. They took them seriously, and often treated them with the respect befitting the rulers of full-grown nations. The Byzantine treaties with the Russians offer valuable evidence of this.

The treaties between Russia and Byzantium in the 10th century are extraordinary documents which can be approached from many directions. Scholars have managed to detect in them a number of laws which were already valid inside the Byzantine Empire—for example, those on shipwreck; in addition, Russian scholars have detected in the treaties traces of laws which are known from Russian collections of a later period.³¹ Generally speaking, the conclusions which can be drawn from these treaties are somewhat ambiguous. In part, the treaties may indicate how well-organised the Russian rule was as early as 911, the earliest firm date for a treaty; to some extent they may reflect the unimaginativeness of the Byzantines, who inflexibly applied laws current among themselves to the barbarians who traded with them. Nonetheless, it seems that, in treating with the Russians and particularly by negotiating with their leaders, the

²⁹ Kyrl-Constantine is accredited with these sentiments in F. Dvornik (trans. and ed.), 'Life of Constantine', in *Les Légendes de Constantin et de Méthode, vues de Byzance*, Prague, 1933, p. 365. cf. F. Grivec and F. Tomšić (eds), *Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicenses: Fontes, Radovi Staroslavenskog Instituta*, IV, Zagreb, 1960, pp. 116–7.

³⁰ Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De ceremoniis*, ed. I. I. Reiske, I, Bonn, 1829, pp. 651, 654–5, 660, 664, 667, 673–4 (hereafter called *De ceremoniis*).

³¹ Survey in I. Sorlin, 'Les Traités de Byzance avec la Russie au XIème siècle,' I, (*Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, II, Paris, 1961, 3, pp. 353–6).

Byzantines helped to develop in the Russians the concept of themselves as a nation, and to enhance the authority of their leaders, particularly the ruler of Kiev.

The ruler of Kiev seems to have been treated as responsible for the detailed enforcement of the treaties, and for the government of the city of Kiev. This is truer of the treaty of 944 than of the treaty of 911, where other princes beside the prince of Kiev are mentioned; but, even in the earlier treaty, the Russians are treated as the subjects—‘under the hand of’—the prince of Kiev, and the city of Kiev is listed as senior to other cities, such as Chernigov and Pereyaslav’. From the treaty of 944 one gains a still firmer impression of the central position of the prince of Kiev in regulating and enforcing the treaty. It is true that in 944 Igor of Kiev was not treated as the sole authority in Russia: many other notables sent representatives to sign the treaty. But the prince of Kiev appears to have been responsible for the detailed regulation of trade with Byzantium. In particular those wishing to travel from or through Russia to Byzantium had, up to the 940s, to obtain gold or silver seals from the prince of Kiev, and after 944, the prince sent letters specifying how many ships he had allowed to travel south.³² The treaty of 944 stipulated that if those who arrived without such letters were slain by the Byzantines, the prince of Kiev was not entitled to any remedy. Thus the prince of Kiev was treated as a ruler responsible for all his subjects, with rights over and obligations towards them all.

Presumably both Slavs and Scandinavian Rus’ were alike under the prince of Kiev’s jurisdiction, in this respect at least, and it is possible that, in his capacity as intermediary between the Byzantines and the peoples of the north, he acquired a new form of jurisdiction and authority, which earlier leaders in Russia had not possessed. It is worth noting that, in negotiating the tariff of reparations and providing for such contingencies as the death of a propertied Russian on Byzantine soil, the prince of Kiev had no clear precedent to guide and constrict him, and so had a larger measure of initiative in making law himself than he had previously possessed. More specifically, the prince must have derived great influence and authority from his monopoly of issuing certificates to travel to Byzantium: it was worthwhile to be on good terms with him to obtain such a certificate. One must admit that the role of the earliest Scandinavian rulers in what is now Russia is unclear. Some of them seem to have been invested with sacred qualities which gave them a place in customary law and in religion, and it would probably be wrong to regard them as nothing more than war-leaders. But in their dealings with the

³² Likhachev, I, p. 35, s.a. 945; Cross, p. 74.

prince of Kiev, whom they called *archon*³³, the Byzantines seem to have recognised his status as head, not just of a ruling-group or a tribe, but of a nation.

One can take this line of thought a little further. It may be that by their dealings with the prince of Kiev, the Byzantines actually encouraged him to acquire the rudiments of a more complicated method of rule. In particular one should note the use of gold and silver seals: perhaps it was the Byzantines who suggested this form of authentication for travellers from Russia, and, indeed, it may have been the Byzantines who provided the matrices of the gold and silver seals. It is hard to see who else could have supplied the technique of producing what must have been a considerable number of gold and silver seals. What is remarkable is their regular use for administrative purposes. In Western Europe at that time such seals were used mainly for ceremonial purposes.³⁴ It is unfortunate that no examples of 10th-century Russian gold or silver seals have survived, but it is probable that, if one were found, its design would have some Byzantine features. Besides the use of seals, the regular use of writing by Russian rulers may well owe something to Byzantine encouragement. For it obviously suited the Byzantines to be in close touch with the ruler of Kiev: 'if our Empire is in need of troops from you to fight our enemies, we shall write to your great prince, and he shall send us as many as we want.'³⁵ Through written communications, the prince of Kiev could act as the citizens of Kherson did, in warning Constantinople of the southward movements of peoples. We have already noted the letters—*gramoty*—which travellers from Russia had to present to the imperial authorities; it may have been by letter that Prince Vladimir once forewarned Basil II of the approach of a group of Scandinavians: 'Look out! Varangians are on their way to you.'³⁶ The habit of using written messages seems to have become well-established in Russia by the early 11th century: princes and governors of towns are depicted as exchanging messages at the time of the discovery of the body of the murdered prince, Gleb.³⁷

³³ *De ceremoniis*, I, pp. 690–1; Sorlin, *op. cit.*, p. 350, n. 137.

³⁴ P. Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom, Renovatio*, I, Darmstadt, 1957, p. 117.

³⁵ Likhachev, I, p. 38, s.a. 945; Cross, p. 76. The Byzantine inspiration for the use of seals in Russia is considered by V. Yanin, *Aktovyye pečati drevney Rusi X—XV vv.*, I, Moscow, 1970, pp. 14–5. Yanin argues that Byzantine Christian designs for the seals would have been inappropriate in pagan Kiev, but suggests no alternative source for them. The question will only be resolved by the re-examination of two seals attributed to Svyatoslav Igorevich, which are said to have been lost: *ibid.*, pp. 40–1, 166, 249.

³⁶ Likhachev, I, p. 56, s.a. 980; Cross, p. 93.

³⁷ On learning that Gleb's body had been found, Yaroslav 'wrote a letter (*epistoliiu*) to the governor of the town' according to Nestor's *Chteniye*; no letter is mentioned in an earlier account of the discovery, but at any rate the use of written messages was customary by the time Nestor wrote the *Chteniye*, between 1079 and 1088: see L. Müller (ed.) *Chteniye in Die altrussischen hagiographischen Erzählungen und liturgischen Dichtungen über die Heiligen Boris and Gleb* (reprint of ed. D. Abramovich), Munich, 1967, p. 14 (hereafter

The dependence on literacy in government hinges on a number of conditions: recipients of written messages must be able to read them and must be in the habit of obeying them. In other words, there must be an alphabet and a number of highly competent scribes. Maybe the Byzantines were encouraging the prince of Kiev to acquire a staff of clerks and some kind of chancery where the treaties could be stored. For the clauses of the treaties indicate that much correspondence was expected between Constantinople and Kiev: visitors from Russia had to present certificates from the princes to the imperial authorities, and, in the case of certain kinds of wrongdoers at Byzantium, 'if they flee back to Rus', we shall write to your prince to deal with them as he thinks fit'.³⁸ Where, then, did the prince of Kiev get his clerks? There is no sure answer to this question, which brings us to the whole problem of the languages spoken in Kiev in the 10th century—Scandinavian or Slavonic?³⁹ Judging by the 10th-century treaties, which appear to have been translated into Slavonic at that time, it appears that Slavonic was the principal medium of communication, together with Greek. Given the fact that correspondence was fairly regularly exchanged between Kiev and Byzantium, it is reasonable to suggest that the prince of Kiev may have obtained a number of clerks from the Byzantines, and that he found it convenient to maintain a number of Byzantines in order to have close economic and military ties with the Empire.

We have no direct evidence of such a body of scribes; but we do know that by 944 there were some Byzantine churchmen in Kiev, for there was in the city a church of St Elijah,⁴⁰ which was almost certainly of Byzantine origin. It would not be surprising if these churchmen performed the task of reading, writing and perhaps even storing the prince's documents for him: for the same reasons that he found it convenient and even prestigious to engage in written communications with the imperial authorities, the prince may have permitted the presence of a few Byzantine, or Byzantine-trained, priests in Kiev.

It may be that political necessity was also one of the principal

called *Chteniye*); cf., *Skazaniye*, *ibid.*, p. 48. For the date of the *Chteniye*, see *Slownik starożytności słowiańskich* (*Lexicon antiquitatum Slavicarum*), III, Wrocław-Warsaw-Cracow, 1967, p. 365.

³⁸ Likhachev, I, p. 35, s.a. 945; Cross, p. 74.

³⁹ That Slavonic was a kind of *lingua franca* was indicated by the Jewish traveller Ibn Yaqub in about 965; he numbers the Rus' among the peoples who had learnt Slavonic through mingling with the Slavs; quoted by A. V. Soloviev, 'L'Organisation de l'état russe au X siècle', in *L'Europe au IX-XI siècles*, Warsaw, 1968, p. 261; cf., J. B. Bury, 'The treatise *De administrando imperio*' (*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, XV, Munich, 1906, p. 542); *Commentary*, p. 42.

⁴⁰ Likhachev, I, pp. 38–9, s.a. 945; Cross, p. 77; see also S. H. Cross, 'The Earliest Mediaeval Churches of Kiev' (*Speculum*, XI, Cambridge, Mass., 1936, p. 478).

reasons why the Byzantines sought to convert the Russians to Christianity. The Byzantines' despair at the Russians' breach of the treaties is reflected in a number of sources: chronicles speak of their disregard for the treaties in the context of 941 and 971, and Constantine Porphyrogenitus describes them, in a letter written in 941, as *Των φιλονίκων διασπαστῆς καὶ ἐχθρὸς ἄσπουδος*.⁴¹ It is probable that one of the pressing reasons why the Byzantines wanted to convert the Russians was a desire to bind them more effectively, by the same oaths, to the treaties established between them;⁴² special provisions were made in the treaty of 944 for Russians who were Christians. One clause specified the fate of Christian Russians who broke it 'And in the land of Rus' thinks of breaking this love [between our peoples] whoever may they, as many as have received baptism, suffer the vengeance of God who has power over all, and be doomed to perdition for century upon century in the years that are to come.'⁴³ The fate threatened for non-Christian Russians who broke the treaty was not exactly pleasant, but it lacked the solemnity of doom from an all-powerful God.

Of course, a concern for the secure observance of treaties was not the sole reason for Byzantine propagation of Christianity. They had a very real desire to save souls, a desire which has perhaps been underestimated by scholars who adopt too narrowly political an approach to the Byzantine religious missions. The emperors seem to have exploited opportunities afforded by official contacts with the princes of Russia. The Emperor Leo VI is said to have made sure that the Russian envoys who negotiated the treaty were shown 'the beauty of the churches, the palaces of gold and the wealth in them, a lot of gold, silken cloaks and precious stones, and the Passion of Our Lord—the nails and the crown'.⁴⁴

It is worth noting the juxtaposition of imperial and ecclesiastical monuments, palaces and churches, and the combination of valuable articles such as gold, with insignificant objects, such as nails and thorns. It must have seemed mysterious to the visitors from the north; here was a culture which combined great material prosperity with austerity, and even a renunciation of material values—the crown of thorns, and Christ's purple cloak, which Oleg's envoys were also shown, were, surely, symbols that Christ's values are not entirely of this world.

⁴¹ J. Darrouzes (ed.), *Épistoliers byzantins du X^e siècle*, Paris, 1960, p. 322, and n. 3.

⁴² Constantine VII noted that the Croats, upon being converted by the Pope, swore an oath in the name of St Peter never to go to war with another country: Moravcsik-Jenkins, pp. 148–9. I am grateful to Dimitri Obolensky for this reference, as for so much else.

⁴³ Likhachev, I, p. 35, s.a. 945; Cross, p. 74.

⁴⁴ Likhachev, I, p. 29, s.a. 912; Cross, p. 69.

We do not know what Oleg's response was to the account which his envoys brought back in 911. It cannot have been very positive, and, indeed, Russia's rulers seem to have remained cautious about 'the God of the Greeks'. Up to 988, only one ruler, Ol'ga, the widow of the leader of a disastrous expedition against Constantinople, seems formally to have adopted Christianity. And, significant as it was, her conversion did not bring about the systematic conversion of the people of Russia. According to the Primary Chronicle, Ol'ga tried to convert her son Svyatoslav to Christianity, but he would not listen and asked her: 'How can I accept this religion alone? My *druzhina* will start to laugh at this'.⁴⁵ Svyatoslav is represented as being afraid to adopt Christianity, because his authority would suffer. He remained a pagan, although he was presumably on amicable terms with Byzantium, for Russian troops were mentioned as serving in Byzantium's army in the latter 950s, and Svyatoslav's intervention in Bulgaria was, initially, designed to quell a Bulgarian revolt on behalf of the Empire. After he had turned against the Byzantines and suffered a humiliating military defeat at Dorostolon, Svyatoslav resumed a policy which had been that of earlier rulers of Russia. He is said to have requested that the Russians be considered friends of the Byzantines 'journeying to Byzantium to do trade, as has been the custom from of old'.⁴⁶ He also requested an interview with the Emperor Zimisce and this was conceded to him. We do not know precisely why Svyatoslav sought this meeting but it may well be that he regarded a public encounter with the emperor as a means of re-establishing his prestige, for he sat on the main cross-bench of his boat and conversed with Zimisce, who was mounted in full splendour on a white horse.⁴⁷ It appears that the Byzantines treated him with respect and, in a sense, saved his face by granting him and the Russians the right to continue to trade with them and, in the short-term, a large quantity of corn. Svyatoslav was treated as though he was still the head of a nation and capable of signing treaties on its behalf.

It is perhaps a mark of the Byzantines' leniency that Svyatoslav's campaigns on the Danube were treated by the Russian Primary Chronicle as, essentially, victories. Of course one must allow for a measure of distortion in the sources, which transformed a tale of defeat into victory, but it is unlikely that Svyatoslav's memory would have been described as 'glorious'—as it was in the 11th century⁴⁸—

⁴⁵ Likhachev, I, p. 46, s.a. 955; Cross, p. 83-4.

⁴⁶ Leo the Deacon, *op. cit.*, p. 156; George Cedrenus, *Historiarum compendium*, ed. I. Bekker, II, Bonn, 1839, p. 412.

⁴⁷ Leo the Deacon, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-7.

⁴⁸ The *Slovo* of Metropolitan Hilarion in L. Müller (ed.), *Des Metropoliten Ilarion Lobrede auf Vladimir*, Wiesbaden 1962, p. 100 (hereafter called *Slovo*).

if the Byzantines had completed their victory at Dorostolon by a massacre of the surviving Russians or by humiliating terms of peace. Instead, Zimisce treated Svyatoslav not, indeed, as an equal, but as a ruler, and offered terms as generous as those conceded to Igor after the failure of his expedition against Byzantium. At one point of his Bulgarian campaign, the Emperor Zimisce is said to have told Svyatoslav: 'It is the Romans' custom to conquer their enemies by kindness rather than weapons.'⁴⁹ Possibly these words flow from the chroniclers' imagination and, in any case, one is liable to dismiss them as rhetoric. Yet as far as Byzantium is concerned they contain a grain of truth which it would be unwise to neglect. For it is possible to view Byzantium not merely as a magnet, but as having a divisive, even disruptive influence in societies with which it came into close contact, such as Russia. It has already been suggested that the Byzantines, in treating Russia's rulers with respect and, as it were, taking them seriously, tended to enhance their authority and even to encourage in the Russians the sense that they were one nation. We must now consider how far Byzantium was capable simultaneously of creating disunity among the northern peoples and undermining their leaders' authority.

On the whole this undermining was contingent rather than deliberate. But one episode related in the Primary Chronicle indicates what powers Byzantium had of fostering disunity among the northern peoples if it so desired. This is the story of the sails given by the Byzantines to the Slavs and to the Russians after their joint expedition in 907. The text is, unfortunately, corrupt and the episode seems to have puzzled the composer of the Primary Chronicle, who may have misunderstood its original significance. Oleg ordered the Byzantines to give the Rus' sails of brocade (*parusy pavolochity*) for their boats, and the Slavs silk sails (*kropin'nyya*) for theirs.⁵⁰ In other words, the Slavs received sails of material as valuable as, perhaps even more valuable than, the Rus's sails.⁵¹ On the journey homewards, the Rus' unfurled their sails of brocade and the Slavs theirs of silk, and the latter tore in the wind. The Slavs concluded from this that 'we

⁴⁹ Cedrenus, *op. cit.*, II, p. 412.

⁵⁰ Likhachev, I, p. 25 s.a. 907 (*PSRL*, I, Moscow, 1962, col. 32; Hypatian Chronicle, *PSRL*, II, Moscow, 1962, col. 23); Cross, p. 65.

⁵¹ *pavoloka*, from which *pavolochity* is derived, does not seem to have meant 'silk' specifically: it designated precious cloth in general, and, in particular, either purple cloth or brocade. *kropin'nyya*, a much rarer word, seems specifically to have meant 'silk'. For *pavoloka*, see I. I. Sreznevsky, *Materialy dlya slovarya drevne-russkogo yazyka*, II, (reprint) Graz, 1955–6, col. 856; V. Dal', *Tolkovyy slovar' zhivogo velikorusskogo yazyka*, III, St Petersburg–Moscow, 1907, p. 3; G. E. Kochin, *Materialy dlya terminologicheskogo slovarya drevney Rossii*, Moscow–Leningrad, 1937, pp. 228–9; M. Vasmer, *Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, II, Heidelberg, 1955, p. 299. For *kropin'nyy*, see Sreznevsky, *op. cit.*, I, cols. 1330, 1281–2; Vasmer, *op. cit.*, I, p. 620.

must keep to our coarse sails, for silk sails are not given to the Slavs';⁵² in other words, they resolved henceforth to keep to their (inferior) place.⁵³ Thus Oleg is depicted as harnessing the Byzantine offer of tribute to demonstrate the superiority of the Rus' to the Slavs—by the trick of procuring for them expensive sails which tore in the wind: 'and they called Oleg "cunning" (*veshchiy*)'.⁵⁴ But the episode also indicates the importance attached by northern peoples to the Byzantines' recognition of differentials of status: the Byzantines could stir up trouble by honouring a subject people as much or more than their masters. The tale told of Oleg tallies with Constantine VII's description in *De administrando* of the rivalry and competition which the appetite for Byzantine luxuries engendered among the northerners.⁵⁵

A deeper disunity which the Byzantines fostered among the inhabitants of Russia was rooted in religion. Scholars have often compared the treaty of 911 with that of 944 and noted that Christian Russians were mentioned in the latter but not in the former. They have, reasonably enough, concluded that by the mid-10th century there were more Christians in Kiev than there had been a generation earlier. But perhaps a little more emphasis should be put on the fact that the Byzantines made special provision for the oath-taking of the Christian Rus'. Various clauses of the treaty of 944 state that, in commercial and other disputes, Christian Rus' and pagan Rus' were to take oaths according to their respective religions. In 911 the pagan Russian envoys had sworn all together 'by the law and custom of our people' to observe the treaty.⁵⁶ In 944 separate provisions were made for the Christian and pagan Rus' to swear to observe the treaty:

⁵² Cf. the rendering, 'Revenons à nos voiles de toile, car les voiles de lin fin [*sic*] ne sont pas faites pour nous', L. Leger, *Chronique dite de Nestor*, Paris, 1884, p. 24. While accepting the great Slavist's rendering of *tolstinam* by *voiles de toile*, 'sail-cloth' or 'canvas', one may prefer Sreznevsky's translation 'silk' to Leger's 'fine linen' for *kropin'nyya*.

⁵³ 'imemsya svoim tolstinam, ne dany sut' Slovenom pre [parusy] kropin'nyya'; the last word, *kropin'nyya*, is in the Hypatian but lacking from the Laurentian version: *PSRL*, II, col. 23; *PSRL*, I, col. 32. Likhachev supplies *pavolochity* after 'Slovenom pre' (Likhachev, I, pp. 25, 221–2; II, p. 185 s.a. 907) and regards the Slavs' statement as simply an explanation of why their sails had torn—because they had not been given brocade sails like the Russians. But his emendation and translation do not explain why the Slavs resolved henceforth to keep to coarse sails; for, from his translation, they might be expected to resolve to use brocade sails; nor does his version serve to demonstrate how this incident illustrates Oleg's cunning. But if the Hypatian's *kropin'nyya* after 'Slovenom pre' is preferred, the tale acquires some pungency: the Slavs are recognising that silk sails are not for them; coarse sails are all that they are fit for.

⁵⁴ *veshchiy* sometimes meant 'magician' and perhaps it was thought that Oleg directly caused the sail to tear (*veshchiy* is translated *Zauberkundigen* 'magician' by R. Trautmann, *Die altrussische Nestorchronik Povest' Vremennykh Let*, Leipzig, 1931, p. 19). But, more probably, the episode shows his astuteness: he knew that the material given to the Slavs for their sails would tear. For *veshchiy*, see Sreznevsky, *op. cit.*, I, cols 502–3; Vasmer, *op. cit.*, I, p. 196.

⁵⁵ Moravcsik–Jenkins, pp. 66–7.

⁵⁶ Likhachev, I, p. 29, s.a. 912. (Likhachev reads: 'po zakonu i po pokonu yazyka nashego' (by the law and custom of our people), following the Hypatian and Sophia I Chronicles: see Likhachev, II, p. 186; cf. *PSRL*, I, col. 37). Cross, p. 68, renders, 'according to our faith and the custom of our nation'; cf. Sorlin, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

the Christian Rus' did so in the church of St Elijah at Kiev, while the prince of the Russians swore, with the non-Christians, before idols on a hill-top.⁵⁷ In some respects this was a ritual act in which the prince led his people and, to the extent that he did not lead the Christian Russians in this, his authority suffered a contraction. The Christian Russians swore by the Holy Cross, which was set before them; it had been by the Holy Cross that the Emperors Leo, Alexander and Constantine had sworn to observe the treaty of 911.⁵⁸ The Christian Russians were following the example not of their own rulers but of the emperor in Byzantium, and worshipped a God by whom the emperors were appointed, according to a phrase in the same treaty.

One does not know how far the Christian Russians regarded themselves, or were regarded by the Byzantines, as under the authority of the tsar at Tsargrad. There was a tendency at Byzantium for the emperor to regard himself as responsible for the welfare of, and therefore in some sense as head of, all Christians. For example, Constantine the Great, in a letter to the king of Persia, remonstrated with him over his treatment of Christians in Persia, and stressed that he was entrusting them to the king of Persia's protection.⁵⁹ Something of the same attitude is present in the treaty of 944 which provided for the ransoming of Christian prisoners from the Russians.⁶⁰ And Christian Russians seem to have played a part in Byzantine court ceremonial, a part apparently not open to pagan Russians; for *De ceremoniis* specified that baptised Russians stood in the ranks of officials and warriors at a reception of Arab envoys in 946.⁶¹ It is, however, true that one should not over-estimate the practical consequences of the existence of a number of Christian Russians: it would be an exaggeration to picture them as torn between their loyalties to their race and their reverence for the emperor. There were probably many Christians in the army which Svyatoslav led against Zimisce in Bulgaria.

Nonetheless, the spread of Christianity in Russia does seem to have caused tensions. Precise evidence is scarce about the numbers and type of Christians in Russia, so that it is necessary to concentrate on the Primary Chronicle's evidence for the 980s. In particular, we can learn something from the case of the Varangian who had become a Christian at Byzantium and eventually retired to Russia with his son. He seems to have held the religion of the Russians in contempt and refused to let his son be sacrificed to their gods who, he said 'are

⁵⁷ Likhachev, I, pp. 38–9, s.a. 945; Cross, p. 77.

⁵⁸ Likhachev, I, p. 29, s.a. 912; Cross, p. 68.

⁵⁹ Migne, *op. cit.*, XX, cols. 1157, 1161.

⁶⁰ Likhachev, I, p. 37, s.a. 945; Cross, p. 75.

⁶¹ *De ceremoniis*, I, p. 579.

not gods, but wood; they are here today, but will rot tomorrow'.⁶² There was, he claimed, only one God, 'the God before whom the Greeks bow down', who was creator of all things. The Varangian's stand may be regarded as a case of civil disobedience, for it disregarded the Russians' religion and it slighted the authority of the prince who was to have led his people in making this particular sacrifice. In a sense, prince Vladimir's authority was being overshadowed by that of the God of the Greeks. It is true that the Varangian was not a native-born Russian but an immigrant, but it must be remembered that Kievan Russia was a very cosmopolitan society whose prosperity depended on the free flow of goods and men. As already noted, trade with Byzantium was of great value to Kiev's rulers: one of the principal requests of Svyatoslav in 971 had been for continued access to Byzantium's market. Prince Vladimir might in the 980s have tried to reduce contact between Russia and the Byzantine Empire. But if he did so he would have risked bringing about economic decline. For the 'route from the Varangians to the Greeks' seems to have been of great importance to Russia's economic unity and, as it happened, was more important in the late 10th century than ever before, because at that time the flow of silver from the Arab world, which had poured up the Volga into Russia and to some extent, into Europe, almost totally dried up.⁶³ Vladimir needed to trade extensively with the Byzantine Empire, but with trade came ideas and, to those who adopted them, Vladimir's religion and, to some extent, his authority, appeared inferior. Certain words of the Russian envoys' report are well enough known: after attending a service in St Sophia, they went back to Russia, and told Vladimir: 'We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth.' But their subsequent statement is less often quoted: 'Any man who tastes something sweet will not put up with what is bitter after that; and so we cannot stay here any more.'⁶⁴ Presumably these Russians went back to Constantinople. Their words and actions have perhaps been dramatised, but here too we see men looking over the shoulders of the prince of Kiev to Byzantium.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that in the 980s the prince of Kiev, Vladimir, was faced with a dilemma. Given the necessity for continued economic contact with Byzantium, he could adopt either of two courses. He could try to compete with the religious and cultural attractions of Byzantium by welding together native cultural traditions on which he might base his authority, or, alternatively, he

⁶² Likhachev, I, p. 58, s.a. 983; Cross, pp. 95-6. Of course the Varangian's refusal sprang from paternal feelings as well as Christian scruples.

⁶³ V. L. Yanin, *Denezhno-vesovyye sistemy russkogo srednevekov'ya*, Moscow, 1956, pp. 129, 134-41, 153; M. Stenberger, *Die Schatzfunde Gotlands der Wikingerzeit*, I, Stockholm, 1958, pp. 247-54.

⁶⁴ Likhachev, I, p. 75, s.a. 987; Cross, p. 111.

could adopt a policy of assimilation. In other words, instead of having to contend with Byzantium as a threat to his prestige, he could harness it and at the same time defend himself from it. For, by adopting Christianity, Vladimir could earn himself a place in the Byzantine world-picture, not indeed the central position, which was reserved for the emperor, but a place which would assure him of continued honour from the Empire, and also strengthen the loyalties of Christian Russians.⁶⁵ Vladimir eventually adopted the second of these alternatives, but not for want of attempting the first. For, early in the 980s, Vladimir seems to have tried to revitalise a number of pagan cults, and to ensure that they were maintained throughout his land: in Novgorod, as well as Kiev, an idol of Perun was set up and sacrifices offered to it by the people.⁶⁶ Our evidence about these cults is very ambiguous, and there is dispute over their origins. This is partly because our sources are sparse and late, but it may also be because the cults were heterogeneous and not clearly defined. As has already been stressed, Kievan Russia was a cosmopolitan society and stood at the crossroads of a number of trade routes. Of these, the Byzantine route was probably the most important, and the cultural influence which emanated from Byzantium was certainly the strongest. But there were other routes, and other influences: from the Bulgars in the east came Muslim proselytisers, and from the same region, the middle and upper Volga and the Oka, came a number of cults which, though hard to define, seem to have been a debased form of Christianity. Against such cults, Vladimir had no form of worship which commanded widespread respect. Indeed, one should remember that the society he ruled over was not only cosmopolitan but also heterogeneous, in the sense that in the late 10th century there may still have been differences of language and belief between the Scandinavian Russians and the Slavic peoples, who themselves maintained a variety of religious customs. If Vladimir had, as it were, chosen 'to go it alone', Byzantium would have been one among a number of disruptive influences in Russian society, and, in the long term, the very idea of 'Russia' as a political and cultural entity might have withered away.

In the short term, however, Vladimir had a firm grip on Russia, and without doubt his personal authority and the military resources at his disposal enabled him to establish Christianity in the principal cities of Kievan Russia. In the mid-11th century Hilarion was emphatic that it was by Vladimir's courage and strength that Christian-

⁶⁵ The standard accounts are G. Ostrogorsky, 'Die byzantinische Staatenhierarchie' (*Seminarium Kondakovianum*, VIII, Prague, 1936, pp. 41-61); F. Dölger, 'Die Familie der Könige im Mittelalter', in *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt*, Darmstadt, 1964, pp. 34-69.

⁶⁶ Likhachev, I, p. 56, s.a. 980; Cross, pp. 93-4.

ity had been established all over Russia.⁶⁷ To some extent Hilarion exaggerated, for there remained vast tracts of paganism in the hinterland away from the river-ways. But, in repeatedly stressing the marvel that 'all the people of Russia' had been converted together, he probably had in mind the fortunes of Christianity in other northern lands, such as Norway and Sweden. There, individual rulers had, with their followers, been baptised, but their act had not been accompanied by systematic conversion of their peoples, and in Sweden the new religion had failed to take root. That it did so in Russia is partly due to Vladimir's energy and personal authority, which Hilarion emphasises. But there is another reason, the fact that, by accepting Christianity from the Byzantines, Vladimir gained access to an abundant supply of priests, builders of churches, works of ecclesiastical literature—which could be, and in part had been, translated into Slavonic—and a style of worship whose beauty had entranced the envoys sent to judge it. At the same time he gained permanent association with a source of authority—the emperor—which commanded respect at most levels of Russian society; the most concrete expression of this association was the Emperor Basil's sister, Anna Porphyrogenita, who became Vladimir's bride. In the Primary Chronicle she is consistently termed *tsaritsa* 'empress', in contrast to Russian-born wives of princes, who are called *knyagini* 'princesses'. This terminology suggests that the Russians were conscious of the honour which had been conferred on Vladimir by the emperor. Honours had been bestowed on previous rulers of Kiev, but they had been material ones—silver and gold—which could differ in quantity, but not in quality, from those offered by Byzantium to other rulers and chieftains of the north. Marriage to a Byzantine *tsaritsa*, born in the purple, was unique in kind and, as an honour, permanent. Even in death, Vladimir and the *tsaritsa* lay side by side in the Church of the Mother of God at Kiev, a permanent expression of love and honour.⁶⁸

This is not the place to go deeply into the question of the extent to which Christianity took root in Russia. One can merely note that by accepting Christianity from the Byzantines, Vladimir tapped the resources of a culture and a religion which were plentiful enough to supply the needs of a whole new land, and attractive enough already to have gained many converts inside Russia. More central to our theme is the effect which the conversion had on Vladimir's authority in Russia. Historians may have approached this problem too rigidly in examining what effect the conversion had on Russia's sovereignty. Three points may be made briefly: first, it is far from clear whether

⁶⁷ *Slovo*, pp. 104–7.

⁶⁸ Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, ed. R. Holtzmann, in *MGH*, Berlin, 1935, p. 488.

'independence' or 'equality' of status were familiar, or cherished concepts to Vladimir. There is an Old Russian word for 'honour'—*chest'*—but there is no Old Russian word for 'independence'. It is probable that Vladimir was anxious to gain a mark of recognition from an indisputable source of honour such as the emperor, rather than to lay claim to independence. As far as status was concerned, it was perhaps more prestigious to gain a place in a long-established and famous framework such as the Byzantine imperial family than to stay outside as king among the minnows. This brings us to a second point: the framework did not, in the 10th or 11th centuries, possess a systematic theoretical backing. That there was a certain ambiguity about the Byzantine imperial family is suggested by the inconsistencies, and even contradictions, in the *De ceremoniis* formulae of addresses to foreign rulers.⁶⁹ The vagueness of Byzantine honours perhaps explains its success, as it was possible for a ruler and the emperor to have different views about their relationship with one another and yet remain on good terms. One might note, for example those payments which the Empire made to a number of its neighbours. In the Byzantines' eyes they were 'gifts', but they were sometimes regarded by the recipient countries as payments of 'tribute'. Perhaps the same ambivalence may be applied to Russia's relations with Byzantium. The third point does not bear directly on the time of the conversion but holds good for the 11th century; the immense sense of liberation which one finds in the 11th and 12th-century references to the conversion in the sources. Hilarion, Nestor, James the Monk and the author of the Primary Chronicle, allude to the freeing of the people of Russia from the old ways and the devils' snares.⁷⁰ In part, these remarks may have been borrowed from conventional Greek literary models,⁷¹ but their frequency and intensity

⁶⁹ For example, according to *De ceremoniis*, I, p. 679, an *archôn tôn archontôn* ranks in fourth place, after an *exousiastes*; yet it is subsequently stated that a seal of two gold *solidi* was sent to the Alans' ruler, who bore the title *exousiastes*, while a gold seal of three *solidi* was to be sent to the *archôn tôn archontôn* of Asporukan, *ibid.*, pp. 688, 687. G. Ostrogorsky is in many ways the champion of the view of an ordered hierarchy of princes, but he himself has noted that in the Byzantine world-picture, a ruler's place depended not only on the significance and power (and, it might be added, religion) of his country, but in his proximity 'to the sacred person of the emperor' ('Vizantiya i kiyevskaya knyaginya Ol'ga', *To Honor R. Jakobson*, II, Paris—The Hague, 1967, p. 1467). In other words, it was at the emperor's discretion, which could be quite arbitrary.

⁷⁰ *Slovo*, p. 107; *Chteniye*, pp. 3–4; James the Monk, 'Pamyat' i pokhvala Vladimiru' in E. Golubinsky, *Istoriya russkoy tserkvi*, I, pt. 1, Moscow, 1901, p. 239 ('Vladimir . . . svobodni vsyaku dushyu . . . svyatogo radi kreshcheniya'); Likhachev, I, p. 83, s.a. 988: 'We sing up to the Lord our God, saying "Blessed be the Lord, who gave us not up as prey to their teeth! The net was broken and we escaped from the Devil's snare . . . and the Lord endures for ever praised by the sons of Rus"''; cf. Cross, p. 118. Certain images in the *Povest'*'s rhapsody on the conversion seem to originate from Cyrillo–Methodian writings about the lateness of the Slavs' conversion to Christianity: see D. Obolensky, 'The heritage of Cyril and Methodius in Russia' (*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XIX, Washington, 1965, pp. 56, 58–9).

⁷¹ The Patriarch Photius, announcing the conversion of the Rus' to Christianity in 867, alluded to the pagan beliefs 'in which they were previously bound (*kateichonto*)' (Migne,

suggest there was real feeling behind them. It seems that educated Russians in the 11th-century regarded Byzantium as a means of liberation from old superstitions and ignorance and of catching up with other Christian nations.⁷²

Let us look ahead now to the mid-11th century, to Kiev with its Golden Gate, its prosperous boyars' halls, and its churches of stone, among which was the metropolitan church of St Sophia. In the eyes of Western Europe, the Russians and the Byzantines were endowed with a common prosperity and a common God. In about 1065, Arnor the Earl's Poet wrote a dirge for his Lord, 'I offer prayers for the valiant earl to God, the ready patron of the Greeks and Gardfolk [Russians]'.⁷³ At about the same time Adam of Bremen wrote of Kiev as rivalling Constantinople.⁷⁴ Adam and his contemporaries were struck by the magnificence of Kiev but their remarks can easily be misinterpreted. For, though some of Kiev's monuments were comparable to Byzantium's, they cannot really be said to rival them. Rather, they were like mirror-images, reflecting Byzantium's own splendour;⁷⁵ and they were for the most part the work of Byzantine designers. Kiev was able to become a second Constantinople because of its close ties with the Byzantine Empire, and because it was ready to recognise the Empire as a source, not only of architects, but also of priests and piety. In other words, Russian rulers were prepared to show a measure of respect for the emperor of Byzantium, and to let the Byzantine Church treat Russia as a metropolitanate within its *oikoumene*. In return they received marks of honour and, occasionally, even Byzantine princesses as brides; on the whole such recognition of their authority by the emperor gave a stamp of validity to their rule in their own country. Indeed their willingness to respect Byzantium brought them prestige which outshone that of other rulers in Northern and Western Europe. Hilarion wrote in the mid-11th century of the Church of the Mother of God at Kiev as being finer than that of any other country in the north.⁷⁶ This church was the work of Byzantine craftsmen. There

op. cit., CII, cols. 736-7). Nicholas Mysticus, in his letters to Symeon of Bulgaria, emphasised the liberation which the Bulgarians owed to the Byzantine Church, and he reproached Symeon for his ingratitude (*ibid.*, CXI, *epistola* X, col. 84).

⁷² This holds true even though Russian churchmen soon began to develop the view that Vladimir took most of the credit for the conversion. See D. Gerhardt, 'Das Land ohne Apostel und seine Apostel', in *Festschrift für D. Cyzéuskyj*, Berlin, 1954, pp. 121-4.

⁷³ G. Vigfusson and F. York Powell (trans. and ed.), *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, II, Oxford, 1883, p. 197.

⁷⁴ Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, ed. B. Schmeidler, in *MGH*, Hanover-Leipzig, 1917, p. 80.

⁷⁵ On the idea of buildings and cities as mirrors of originals, see the suggestive remarks of W. Philipp, 'Die religiöse Begründung der altrussischen Hauptstadt', in *Festschrift für M. Vasmer*, Wiesbaden, 1956, pp. 375-9.

⁷⁶ *Slovo*, p. 123.

were features of decoration in St Sophia and the Church of the Mother of God which show that they were decorated in the latest fashion current in Byzantium.⁷⁷ Byzantine art and architecture were also admired in Western Europe; Carolingian and, later, German rulers welcomed the arrival of Byzantine embassies with their relics, precious cloths and gold bulls,⁷⁸ but, when Charlemagne built a chapel at Aachen, it was constructed not according to the latest designs at Constantinople, but on the pattern of San Vitale at Ravenna. San Vitale is, indeed, a model of Byzantine art, and Ravenna was the capital of the Byzantine exarchate in Italy. But it is in a sense provincial, and to that extent, Aachen is second-hand provincial architecture. Perhaps it is rash to suppose that Western rulers always wanted to copy as closely as possible Byzantine styles, but at times this desire is fairly clear; for example, Otto III's *Renovatio imperii Romani* gained part of its visible expression from Byzantine models.⁷⁹

Unlike the rulers of the west, Russia's princes do not seem systematically to have claimed the title or authority of an emperor, and they were therefore less liable to offend Byzantium's rulers. As a result they had better access than the German emperor to the fountains of Byzantine culture—to its literary works, its art and its architecture. Russian princes in the 11th century had humbler pretensions than German emperors, but their silks, gold and ceremonial, and indeed their wealth must have made them visually more impressive figures. In part, the failure of Russia's rulers systematically to lay claim to the title of emperor may be explained by their country's inability to grasp the concept of empire, which meant more to peoples such as the Germans, who had memories and visible reminders of the Roman Empire of old. But it was also due to the fact that greater honour and prestige accrued to them by stopping short of claims to equality with, or superiority to the Byzantines. The essence of this may be conveyed by comparing a painting and an episode. The painting is on the wall of St Sophia at Kiev and depicts the family of Yaroslav in their ceremonial vestments. A Soviet scholar has noted that the vestments are modest by Byzantine standards, but, in general, the figures' costumes are examples of fine Byzantine work.⁸⁰ From the splendour, and the dignity of these

⁷⁷ C. Mango, 'The Date of the Narthex mosaics of the Church of the Dormition at Nicaea' (*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XIII, 1959, pp. 249–50); M. K. Karger, *Drevniy Kiyev*, II, Moscow–Leningrad, 1961, p. 93.

⁷⁸ W. Ohnsorge, 'Die Legation des Kaisers Basileios II an Heinrich II', in *Abendland und Byzanz*, Darmstadt, 1958, pp. 301, 306, 315–6.

⁷⁹ Schramm, *op. cit.*, I, 1957, pp. 110–2, 114, 117, 158, 226; cf. *ibid.*, II, Leipzig, 1929, pp. 17–24. On Western attitudes towards and imitations of Byzantine chrysobulls, see F. Dölger, 'Die Kaiserurkunde der Byzantiner als Ausdruck ihrer politischen Anschauungen', in *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt*, p. 29, n. 80.

⁸⁰ V. N. Lazarev, 'Grupповой портрет семейства Ярослава', in *Russkaya srednevekovaya zhivopis'*, Moscow, 1970, pp. 40, 52.

figures, let us turn to poor Bishop Liudprand, when he was caught trying to smuggle Byzantine silks out of the Empire. Liudprand, like the Russians, had a taste for Byzantine luxury goods, but, unlike them, he wanted to set up another empire next to, or instead of, Byzantium, and he probably intended these silks for his master, the Emperor Otto I. Liudprand's dilemma was that for him, as for the Russians, Byzantium remained the most impressive working-model of an organised state, whose trappings prospective emperors in the West needed to acquire to add conviction to their claims. But, by the very fact that they made such claims, it was more difficult for them to give them visible substantiation, in the form of insignia and court ceremonial.

At about the time of Liudprand's encounter with the customs-officers, the pagan Russians were sacrificing prisoners-of-war to their gods on the banks of the Danube. They had, as a people, come a long way by the 1040s, when St Sophia at Kiev was built and decorated. For Yaroslav's grandfather, war against 'the Greeks' had been the principal means by which he could gain prestige and ascendancy for himself. To Christian princes such as Yaroslav, a more sedentary course was available: the Byzantines could offer alternative sources of prestige to rulers who were friendly towards them. The building of St Sophia in Kiev put 'Russia' on the map of Europe far more surely than Svyatoslav's wars, which are not even mentioned in Western European sources. Distrust and even dislike continued to fester between Russians and Byzantines. But, by formally adopting Byzantine Christianity between 988 and 989, Vladimir put to positive use what had tended to be a disruptive force in Russian society. Membership of a common Church was to give the far-flung inhabitants of Russia something in common with one another, which they would not otherwise have possessed.

⁸¹ Liudprand of Cremona, *Opera*, ed. J. Becker, in *MGH*, Hanover-Leipzig, 1915, pp. 204-6.